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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to test the relationship between dogmatism and agreement with the television character Archie Bunker among adult Canadians. It was hypothesized that highly dogmatic Canadians would demonstrate the same identification with Archie Bunker that highly dogmatic viewers from the U. S. demonstrate, and it was also hypothesized that Canadians would not view "All in the Family" as being true to life, as U. S. viewers do, since the program is not in a Canadian setting. Two random samples were drawn from adults in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Athens, Georgia--both university communities. Both hypotheses were confirmed. (RB)

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A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Viewer Agreement with Opinionated Television Characters

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Problem and Conceptual Base

Since its beginning in 1971, the television program "All In The Family" has been at the center of controversy. While the producer and the supporters of the show argue that the show helps to destroy prejudice by allowing people to laugh at their foibles (Lear, 1971), a host of critics have argued that the show reinforces prejudice by giving the bigot someone who agrees with him (Hobson, 1971). Recently social scientists have entered the debate. Surlin (1973) and Vidmar and Rokeach (1974) have focused upon the question of prejudice reinforcement by examining viewer attitudes toward the show.

Vidmar and Rokeach (1974) argue that selective perception is at work when people who are prejudiced watch the show. Selective perception causes people who are prejudiced to pay attention to those messages expressed by Archie Bunker which are congruent to their beliefs and attitudes about minority groups. These people use the program to reinforce their prejudice and stereotypes. In a study of Canadian adults and U.S. teenagers, Vidmar and Rokeach found a significant relationship between high scores on an ethnocentricism scale, watching "All In The Family" and liking Archie Bunker.

Cooper and Jahoda (1947), in an original and base-setting paper in this conceptual area, have shown that prejudiced persons can be quite immune to messages constructed to change their prejudice. Larimer (1966), utilizing attitude measurement techniques developed by the Sherif's, has shown that when persons hear a speech, the content of which falls within their latitude of rejection, they will derogate the source rather than accept the message. Thus, the ethnocentric individual accepts the arguments of Archie Bunker, applauds them, and derogates his son-in-law Mike as a long haired drop-out from responsible society (see Vidmar and Rokeach, 1974). The dogmatic individual identifies with the dogmatism of Archie Bunker while the open minded individual laughs at

Archie and supports the rest of the family in their struggle against him.

Surlin (1973) focused upon the relationship between dogmatism and liking or agreeing with a dogmatic television character like Archie Bunker. Surlin found that high dogmatic individuals did agree with Archie significantly more than did low dogmatic individuals. Similarly the low dogmatics agreed more with Mike, Gloria, and Edith than with Archie. Surlin's sample consisted entirely of adults in the United States.

While the Vidmar and Rokeach (1974) sample compared viewers of "All In The Family" in the U.S. with Canadian viewers, the two subgroups were not of the same age or socio-economic status. Similarly while their Canadian sample was randomly drawn from voter registration lists in London, Ontario, the U.S. sample consisted of students in a high school in Illinois. These two disparate groups have little in common on which to make meaningful comparisons. How do the attitudes of Canadian adults about "All In The Family" compare with attitudes of adult Americans?

Vidmar and Rokeach (1974) have shown that Canadian adults who score high on an ethnocentricism scale significantly agree more with Archie Bunker than Canadian adults scoring low on the same scale. They do not, however, provide more than face validity for their ethnocentricism scale. Surlin (1973), on the other hand, utilized the short form of the dogmatism scale to measure the relationship between dogmatism and agreement with Archie Bunker. While the short form dogmatism scale has some problems (see Troldahl and Powell, 1965) these are known and can be taken into account when generalizing from the data.

Study

This study was conducted to test the relationship betweer dogmatism and agreement with Archie Bunker among adult Canadians. It was also conducted to compare the responses of adult Canadians about "All In The Family" with those

of adult Americans as reported by Surlin (1973). Klapper (1971) and Surlin (1973) have reported studies of attitudes towards Archie Bunker among adult television viewers in the U.S. but, as was pointed out above, no study has made an adequate cross national comparison. Although it was impossible to conduct a national cross section opinion poll because of cost, it was possible to compare two random samples of adults drawn in the U.S. and Canada.

It was hypothesized that highly dogmatic Canadians would demonstrate the same identification with Archie Bunker that highly dogmatic Americans demonstrate (Surlin, 1973). It was also hypothesized that Canadians would not view "All In The Family" as being true to life as do American's since it is not in a Canadian setting. In other words, there should be significant differences between American audiences and Canadian audiences in their perception of the reality of "All In The Family."

Method

Two random samples were drawn during the latter part of 1972 and 1973 from two communities in Canada and the United States. The U.S. sample was drawn from adults in Athens, Georgia. The sample was obtained through a systematic selection of households contained within randomly selected city blocks. Personal interviews were conducted during Spring, 1972.

The Canadian sample was drawn from adults in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Persons to be interviewed were selected randomly from randomly selected houses located on randomly selected blocks. Personal interviews were conducted during Fall, 1973. As in Athens, Georgia, student volunteers who had been carefully trained served as interviewers.

Athens, Georgia is an university town in the Southeastern portion of the United States. It is located in a state known for the prejudice to be found in its rural areas. Saskatoon is also a university town located in

one of the prairie provinces of Canada. The Province of Saskatchewan is predominently rural, and is known for prejudice against its minority Indian population (Adams, 1971). The area immediately North and West of Saskatoon was labelled in the late 1950's by McClean's magazine as the "Alabama of Canada."

At the time of the survey in Canada "All In the Family" had been on television in Saskatoon for two years. It was shown weekly on the C.B.C. Saskatoon has one C.B.C. channel and one C.T.V. channel. It does not receive any American television channels and does not have cable television. Saskatoon viewers also had an opportunity to see "Maude" and "Sanford and Son," two other Norman Lear productions, as well as the British original on which "All In The Family" is based. At the time of the survey, "All In The Family" was on in the same Friday evening time period as "Sanford and Son" on the C.T.V. Persons interviewed in Saskatoon were also asked questions about "Sanford and Son." It was, however, impossible for them to watch both "Sanford and Son" and "All In The Family" at the same time.

Persons interviewed in each sample were asked questions concerning their viewing habits, the humour and reality of "All In The Family", and their liking and agreement with each of the various characters on the show. At the close of the interview, they responded to the short-form Dogmatism test and were asked questions concerning age, education, income, and occupation.

Findings

Table one gives the cross-national comparisons for these two samples on several different measures. It should be noted that there are no significant demographic differences between the two groups. The social economic status level was scored utilizing comparable U.S. and Canadian social economic status

indices developed by the census agencies in each country. Thus, the two samples do not differ significantly on age, sex, income, education, or social economic status.

Also, there is no significant difference between the two samples on dogmatism. In Canada there were 49 persons who scored high on the dogmatism test; 160 persons fell in the moderate dogmatism range; 64 persons fell in the low dogmatism range. In the U.S., 44 persons demonstrated high dogmatism, 160 moderate dogmatism, and 61 low dogmatism.

Generally, Canadians viewed "All In The Family" less than Americans. They also rated the show as less humorous than the American viewers. When asked how true to life the show was, Canadian respondents felt that it was less "true to life" than American respondents, as hypothesized. Canadians were more prone to "agree" with Mike, Gloria, and Lionel than Americans. While the Canadian and American samples did not differ on the amount of "agreement" with Archie Bunker, Americans "like" Archie significantly more than Canadians. (See Table #1)

Within the Canadian subgroup persons with low social economic status and low education "agreed" with Archie more than persons of high social economic status and college or university education. No significant differences were found in agreement with Archie when viewers were compared on income, age, or sex. (See Table #2)

One of the purposes of this study was to explore the relationship between dogmatism and agreement with Archie Bunker among Canadian viewers. It was hypothesized that Canadian viewers would exhibit the same relationship between high dogmatism and agreement with Archie Bunker that American viewers exhibit. Like the American subgroup, Canadians who scored high on the dogmatism test agreed significantly more with Archie Bunker than Canadians who scored low ($t = 3.21, p < .01$). In the Canadian subgroup, therefore, the television viewer

who "agrees" with Archie Bunker is the person who shares the most social characteristics with Archie, e.g., low level of education, low social economic status, and high dogmatism.

Discussion

Three studies (Surlin, 1973; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974; and now Tate & Surlin, 1975) have now shown a consistent relationship between either high ethnocentricism and agreement with Archie Bunker, or high dogmatism and agreement, within two different cultural settings. While none of the studies utilized a national cross-section sample so that results could be generalized to the 50 million or more viewers of the show, there does appear to be a strong relationship between one's prior beliefs, irrespective of the cultural setting, and those messages one agrees with during the show.

Klapper (1971) has pointed out that studies such as this cannot deal with the question of attitude change due to viewing the program. None of the studies done to this date claim to test such a relationship. One must, however, on the basis of the data call into question the claims of the producers of the show that "All In The Family" does have positive effects upon viewers. It would appear more reasonable to argue that the effects of the show lie in reinforcing existing positions or beliefs.

Carroll O'Connor (1973, 1974) has indicated that vast amounts of mail have been received by participants in the show which indicates that people identify with Archie, Edith, Mike, Gloria and other persons portrayed in "All In The Family." Certainly the show touches responsive chords in the minds of most people. Further research is needed to assess the results of this relationship between viewing "All In The Family" and its influence upon prejudice among viewers.

Finally, Vidmar and Rokeach mention a relationship between high prejudice and identification of Fred Sanford as the typical Black on "Sanford and Son."

In the Saskatoon study Canadians were asked how often they watched "Sanford and Son" and to rate the humor of the show. There was no relationship between watching the show, or the humor of the show, and high dogmatism. Further research also needs to be done on viewers perceptions with Fred Sanford, and other programs which use opinionated television characters.

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TABLE #1

CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISONS: "ALL IN THE FAMILY"

(N = 543)

(1-5 Scale with:
1 = more favourable response
5 = less favourable response)

Concept	American $\bar{X}$ (n = 267)	Canadian $\bar{X}$ (n = 276)	t	sig.
(1) How often watch	2.06	2.37	3.55	.001
(2) Humor of AITF	2.10	2.4[illegible]	4.29	.001
(3) Agree with Archie	3.37	3.42	0.56	n.s.
(4) Like Archie	2.23	2.71	6.47	.001
(5) Agree with Mike	2.75	2.48	4.12	.001
(6) Like Mike	2.44	2.40	0.66	n.s.
(7) Agree with Edith	2.65	2.64	0.18	n.s.
(8) Like Edith	2.20	2.32	1.71	n.s.
(9) Agree with Gloria	2.66	2.47	3.16	.01
(10) Like Gloria	2.36	2.40	0.67	n.s.
(11) Agree with Lionel	2.61	2.48	2.22	.05
(12) Like Lionel	2.38	2.40	0.36	n.s.
(13) AITF is "true to life"	2.52	2.93	4.66	.001

TABLE #2

COMPARISONS WITHIN THE CANADIAN SUBGROUP
Rating "Agreement with Archie Bunker"
(1-5 Scale, 1 = Strongly Agree)
(N = 276)

	$\bar{X}$'s of High Ranking Subgroups	$\bar{X}$'s of Low Ranking Subgroups	t	Sig.
Education	3.62 (n=98)	3.20 (n=158)	3.29	.001
Occupation	3.78 (n=49)	3.32 (n=115)	2.62	.01
Income	3.56 (n=108)	3.35 (n=141)	1.62	n.s.
Age	3.30 (n=63)	3.56 (n=115)	1.60	n.s.
Sex	Female 3.50 (n=151)	Male 3.30 (n=125)	1.60	n.s.
Dogmatism	3.02 (n=50)	3.64 (n=64)	3.21	.01